

may actually sound appealing, but as we know, there is no such thing as a free lunch. Let me explain.

Right now, doctors and hospitals make up the difference between what a procedure costs and what the government is willing to pay for it by passing those costs on to private insurers. But doctors and hospitals would likely get even less under a new government health plan, so they would shift even more costs on to private insurers, who would then raise rates for individuals and businesses even higher than they were before. Once these higher rates take effect, employers would be all but certain to start encouraging workers to enroll in the government-run plan.

As a result of all of this, it is easy to see how private market health plans would become more and more expensive and thus less and less affordable and accessible. At some point, private health plans would likely be crowded out altogether, and government care would be the only option left. That is where the delays and the denied care would begin to kick in. Under a government system, Americans would have no choice but to accept all the bureaucratic hassles and the endless time spent on hold waiting for a government service representative to take their calls. They would also have to deal with all of the restrictions of care that inevitably follow. What is being advertised as an option will eventually lead to delays—delays in testing, delays in diagnosis, and delays in treatment.

So the question Americans need to ask themselves is whether this is the reform they really want. Do we really want a government takeover of health care, because that is what a so-called government option would lead to in very short order. Americans need to realize that when someone says “government option,” what could really occur is a government takeover that soon could lead to government bureaucrats denying and delaying care and telling Americans what kind of care they can have.

The irony in all of this is that as a result of a government takeover of health care, the private plans tens of millions of Americans currently enjoy will eventually only be available to just a very few wealthy Americans—to those who are able to pay for more health care than they currently have and like. According to a recent study, 119 million Americans would lose the private coverage they currently have as a consequence of a government plan. The best options would only remain available to a select few.

Over the last few months, we have seen government getting involved in virtually every aspect of our economy. Washington is suddenly running the banks and the auto companies. Now it is thinking about running America's health care. The results, I am afraid, would not lead to the kinds of reforms Americans really want in their health care. Instead, it would lead to a system that most Americans would deeply regret.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 97, the nomination of Hillary Chandler Tompkins to be Solicitor of the Department of the Interior; that the nomination be confirmed; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; that no further motions be in order; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; that upon confirmation, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; and that the Senate then resume legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, and I will have to object, I would just say to my friend from New Mexico, we have not been able to get that nomination cleared yet on this side, but we will be consulting with the Republican colleagues and at some point let him know whether it is possible to go forward. Therefore, I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, let me briefly describe the circumstances that caused me to make this unanimous-consent request. I am obviously disappointed there has been an objection raised to the confirmation of Ms. Tompkins. I am advised that one or more Republican Members have placed an anonymous hold on her nomination.

The Solicitor of the Department of the Interior—the office to which the President has nominated Ms. Tompkins—is one of the most important posts in the Department of the Interior and one of the most important legal positions in our government. The Department of the Interior has broad authority over the administration and care of our public lands and natural resources. Its many offices and bureaus face daily a broad range of legal issues requiring special expertise in public land law, mining law, water rights law,

Indian law, and wildlife law. The Solicitor is the Department's general counsel. She is solely responsible for the legal work of the Department. By law, all the legal work of the Department is performed under the supervision and direction of the Solicitor. She is responsible for the interpretation and application of the legal authority affecting all of the actions taken under the Department of the Interior's programs and operations.

The job requires a deep knowledge of the law, professional experience, and sound judgment. In my view, the President has nominated such a person—a person with demonstrated ability and stature in this field in the person of Hillary Tompkins. She earned a law degree at Stanford University Law School in 1996. She served as a trial attorney in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice, as a special Assistant U.S. Attorney in Brooklyn, as an associate in Sonosky Chambers, one of the Nation's leading law firms specializing in Native American law, as chief counsel to the Governor of New Mexico, and as an adjunct law professor at the University of New Mexico Law School.

As chief counsel to Governor Bill Richardson, Ms. Tompkins demonstrated her ability to lead and manage a team of lawyers, to oversee the general counsels of multiple agencies, and to render sound legal advice and counsel.

She will bring to the Solicitor's office considerable expertise in the areas of environmental, natural resources, water, and Indian law, as well as experience in the areas of constitutional law, administrative law, and the legislative process.

In addition, Ms. Tompkins has a compelling personal story. She was born on the Navajo reservation, and although she was raised in New Jersey, she has not lost touch with her Navajo heritage. If confirmed, she will be the first Native American, and only the second woman, to hold the office of Solicitor.

It is unclear to me why anyone would object to confirming Ms. Tompkins. She is clearly well qualified for the position. At her hearing in April and in the weeks since then, Senators on the other side of the aisle have expressed their concerns about departmental policies, over which Ms. Tompkins has had no control and no responsibility. Secretary Salazar has bent over backwards to address those concerns, and it is my understanding all of those concerns now have been addressed.

In any event, Senators had chosen to place holds on David Hayes's nomination to be the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, rather than on Ms. Tompkins' nomination, pending resolution of their concerns. The holds on Mr. Hayes's nomination were lifted before the recess, and he and all of the other Department of the Interior nominees have now been confirmed. Only Ms. Tompkins' nomination is still being blocked.

Many of the most pressing problems facing the Department of the Interior